

## Chapter 13

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## **Chapter 13**

# **Community Development**

By the year 2025 Charles County will have an additional 56,000 residents, 23,000 new housing units, and 13,500 new jobs. The physical layout and settings of the new dwellings, retail areas, businesses, services and public facilities, the relationship between the existing and new development, and the creation of healthy, vital communities are the focuses of this chapter.

The desire to improve community character was a prime concern of the 1997 Plan update's Citizens' Advisory Committee and endorsed by the County Commissioners in their review of the draft Plan. Concerns centered on the following:

- Town Centers had not developed as the 1990 Comprehensive Plan envisioned, as physical centers of community with a distinctive community character or theme.
- Residential subdivisions were being built as standalone developments unrelated to adjoining lands. With the exception of some approved subdivisions, few developments were physically connected to each other with roads or sidewalks, thus discouraging community interaction and a sense of connectedness.
- Charles County needed to achieve better all-round quality of development and quality of life in areas such as urban design and construction, well-designed and used public spaces, provision for pedestrian activity, pride in community development, cultural and entertainment activities, night life etc.
- Unattractive or degraded sites in highly visible locations were a blighting influence and presented a negative image of the County.
- Generic development both for site improvements and buildings were making development in Charles County indistinguishable from development in other areas.
- An increasing crime rate and incidents of serious, violent crimes were affecting residents' positive perception of the County as a healthy community that was developing in the right direction. The County needed to understand better how it could help create and maintain communities that are physically and socially healthy and vital.

The quality of the County's built environment is a theme that runs through many elements of the Comprehensive Plan. The 1990 Plan did not have a separate community development element. Instead, it integrated community development concepts throughout the document, primarily in the Land Use and Implementation chapters. Because of the CAC's concerns for community development and character, this chapter was added in 1997 to focus attention on this subject. This 2006 Plan updates the chapter in light of community development activity since 1997.

### **Actions since adoption of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan**

Since the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, the County has made significant efforts to improve the quality of new development in the County.

1. The County prepared and adopted sub-area plans for Waldorf and Bryans Road-Indian Head as recommended in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan.

The Waldorf Sub-Area Plan, adopted in 2004, establishes an overall image of what the Waldorf area should be and how it should look in the future. The plan pays special attention to creating attractive places that can serve as activity nodes (town centers) for the area.

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The Bryans Road-Indian Head Sub-Area Plan, adopted in 2001, establishes a vision for this portion of the County, and includes a detailed vision and urban design plan for the Bryans Road Town Center area.

2. In 2004 the County approved an agreement for mixed-use development of Waldorf Crossing a site at a key location spanning both sides of US 301 at the northern gateway to the County. The development was approved as a Transit Oriented Development under regulations adopted in 1999.
3. In 2004 the County developed architectural and site design guidelines and standards for commercial and industrial development.
4. In 2003, the County adopted architectural and site design guidelines and standards for single family dwellings in the Development District.
5. In 2003, the Department of Community Services prepared a Community Legacy Plan for Heathcote Road, recommending ways to stabilize and improve this neighborhood in Smallwood Village.
6. In 2000 the County created a Site Design and Architectural Review Board. The Board started reviewing projects in 2003, pursuant to the adopted guidelines.
7. In 2000, the County adopted minimum housing size and appearance standards for single family detached and townhouse units in the Development District.

### Goals and objectives

The goal for community development in Charles County is to:

**Integrate existing and future development into a cohesive whole that creates a distinct, attractive and healthy community character for Charles County.**

#### Objectives

The following objectives provide direction toward achievement of this goal:

- 13.1 Define what community character means for different parts of Charles County and develop visions for key areas.
- 13.2 Integrate the County's planned communities with the rest of the County.
- 13.3 Determine the appropriate role for the County in planning for the large majority of the County that is not in communities that have been comprehensively planned such as St. Charles and developments that have been approved through the Planned Development process.
- 13.4 Continue to seek improvement in the design quality of development in the County.
- 13.5 Understand how the County can contribute to the development and maintenance of healthy, vital communities.
- 13.6 Move beyond planning into more implementation of community development objectives.

## **Towards a definition of community character for Charles County**

Community character is the sum of the characteristics that make a place distinctive. Community development involves efforts to enhance those features or characteristics that the community values so that its overall community character is enhanced. Charles County is diverse and different parts of the County have their own character. The overall characteristics that residents value are listed in Chapter 1 and are repeated here for convenience:

Rural character	Waterfront resources	Cultural/ethnic diversity
Historic features	Natural resources and environment	Affordable housing
Smaller settlements, villages	Agricultural resources	Proximity to employment and service

Development in Charles County over the past 25 or so years, particularly in the Development District, has had a suburban character that conflicts with many of the above listed characteristics. In the County's rural areas there is a sense that the valued characteristics are being lost or are under threat. This section discusses community character under two subheadings:

1. Development Districts
  - a. Urban areas
  - b. Suburban areas

2. Rural Areas

A distinction between the Development District and the Rural Areas is necessary because the Comprehensive Plan's land use concept envisions very different land uses and levels of development in these two areas.

### **1. Development Districts**

The Development Districts concept protects many of the characteristics valued by residents such as rural character, agricultural resources and smaller settlements by directing 75 percent of future growth into higher density development on public water and sewer. Given that County policy is to direct growth to these areas, clearly it is not intended to retain overall rural character here. The question then is what form should development take in the Development District?

#### *Overall Vision*

The overall vision for community character in the Development District is for compact development, urban in places, that respects the area's environmental resources and, in suburban areas, retains elements of rural character such as contiguous areas of open space and woods, views, scenic roads, and references to County history and culture.

The Development District can be divided into two types of areas, urban and suburban, either as they exist or as they are envisioned in the land use plan.

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### *a. Urban areas*

Urban areas are the Urban Core of Waldorf, which includes much of existing St. Charles, the incorporated towns of La Plata and Indian Head, and Bryans Road Town Center. The community character vision for urban areas is:

**In urban areas the community character should be urban, and new development and redevelopment should seek to enhance urban character.** This means incorporating concepts such as the following into development planning:

- Compact areas with public and private uses within walking distance.
- Center of the community having a distinct character or theme.
- Areas of vitality and diversity, including a mix of commercial, office, residential, public institutional and park uses, which contribute to the concept of community center.
- Urban character and feel with abutting buildings and smaller setbacks, all organized around a system of city blocks with sidewalks and a formal streetscape.
- An area with higher residential density mix of single-family, townhomes, and other unit types.

### *b. Suburban areas*

Suburban areas can be divided into existing and planned suburbs, and areas with existing scattered development.

Existing and planned suburban areas include portions of St. Charles, and development along highway corridors such as Berry Road (MD 228), Bensville Road (MD 229), and Pomfret Road (MD 227). They represent the majority of recent development in the County. Large areas of the Development District currently have little or scattered development. These are green or undeveloped wedges between the growth corridors that currently retain elements of rural character because of the lack of development around them. Without efforts to define a vision for these areas they can be expected to develop, for the most part, like the suburban areas. In 2001, due to concerns over scattered uncoordinated development, approximately 18,000 acres of this area in the southern portion of the Development District, was put into a deferred development zoning district; the Rural Conservation Deferred RC (D) district. The community character vision for suburban areas is:

**In suburban areas the community character should be high quality suburban development organized around a network of open space and community facilities.**

To a large extent, the community character in existing suburban areas is already set as low or low-to-medium residential-suburban development, with gross densities of around two to three dwelling units per acre. The type and quality of development varies from development to development. Some communities such as St. Charles have successfully created community clusters connected to schools, recreation facilities, and village centers that serve as a community focus. Other communities have developed in somewhat scattered fashion, more or less as land or water and sewer facilities have become available. Although the great majority of new development follows the cluster development provisions of the zoning ordinance, there is still concern that these developments are not integrated well enough with other development within the larger area prompting further concerns about sprawl and unplanned leapfrog development. Many of the County's efforts to improve development design have focused on these areas, such as encouraging cluster developments and requiring design codes.

To improve community character in suburban areas, the 1997 Comprehensive Plan recommended a geographic division of these areas to create a framework to make these areas more understandable

and manageable for planning purposes, and improving the quality of development from a community character standpoint. In response to these recommendations the County prepared sub-area plans for Bryans Road-Indian Head and for Waldorf, and has paid much attention to improving the quality of new development through the subdivision and site plan approval process.

### **2. Rural areas**

Roughly 80 percent of the County lies outside the County's main Development District. Here, the landscape is dominated by forest and agricultural land, although increasing rural residential development in this area is a concern to the extent that it changes the character of the rural landscape.

The overall vision for community character in the Rural Areas is to preserve rural character in an economically sustainable manner. This means preserving agricultural, forested, marsh and waterfront landscapes, protecting important views, scenic vistas and references to County history and culture, and maintaining and enhancing rural villages. New economic activity is necessary to keep the rural areas vibrant, but it respects and fits into the older, existing landscape rather than taking it over and dominating it.

Retaining rural character is an overarching goal of the Comprehensive Plan. The question is how to achieve it. The zoning that is now in place permits residential development at a density of around one house per five acres. The 1997 Comprehensive Plan noted the concern that this type of large lot development was incompatible with the overall vision for community character, and recommended a Rural Commission to develop a plan for the rural area. The Rural Commission completed its report in 2002, making a broad suite of recommendations including:

- Combining the current AC and RC zoning districts.
- Downzoning portions of the rural area.
- Requiring the “buying” of increased development density in different parts of the County through use of transferable development rights (TDRs).
- Requiring higher amounts of open space preservation in rural areas by requiring that development be clustered.
- Greater support for agriculture and agricultural preservation

In 2004, the County Commissioners held hearings on the Rural Commission report and the Planning Commission’s supplemental recommendations. While rejecting the recommendation to downzone portions of the rural area, the Commissioners requested further study on the clustering and TDR recommendations with a view to adopting legislation. In 2005 the County Commissioners amended the cluster provisions in the AC zoning district to remove a density disincentive to clustering.

### Techniques for achieving community character

Based on the County's experience since 1997, this section discusses techniques that the County can use to continue to work towards the community character described above.

#### 1. Area Planning

The 1997 Comprehensive Plan recommended an area planning program to make detailed statements for how the three parts of the development district (Waldorf, Central Area, and Bryans Road-Indian Head) should develop. With the completion of the Bryans Road-Indian Head and Waldorf sub-area plans, the County has made significant strides towards playing a more proactive role in influencing how these areas develop.

##### *Central Area (Bensville)*

The County did not develop a sub-area plan for Bensville following the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. This was in part due to competing planning priorities. However, the need for such a plan lessened in January 2001 when the County downzoned large areas in the central and western parts of the development district, creating a low density (1 du/10 acres) Rural Conservation Deferred Development District RC(D).

The County Commissioners asked the 2006 Comprehensive Plan Citizens' Work Group (CWG) to consider whether a sub-area plan was needed in Bensville and, if not, whether there were areas within Bensville that should be designated for higher density residential development during this Plan update.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Citizens' Work Group (CWG) looked carefully at growth and at the development supply and demand in Bensville and in the RC(D). The CWG concluded that a sub-area plan was not needed for Bensville. A sub-area plan is generally a fairly complex planning effort prepared when significant planning issues may be at stake, such as the amount of growth that should be permitted in an area or where business or employment land uses should be located in relation to residential uses. The CWG felt that Bensville does not face this complexity of planning issues. Little if any business or employment development is contemplated in Bensville because County policy, developed through the Comprehensive Plan and the sub-area plans, is to direct higher density development to the urban core in Waldorf and to Bryans Road - Indian Head.

Instead of a full-scale sub-area plan, the CWG recommended preparation of a *functional plan*, that would address the key questions regarding how Bensville will function with regards to circulation (roads, transit, walking and bicycling), sewer and water, schools, and parks and recreation. Such a plan will ensure that as development occurs, it fits into a well-functioning context.

With respect to development density, the CWG concluded that a moderate increase in potential density in Bensville tied to use of TDRs will help achieve several objectives.

- More housing opportunity in the Development District
- More efficient use of land in Bensville.
- Allow for greater diversity of single-family housing types.
- Further stimulate use of TDRs to preserve rural areas.

##### *Area planning implementation*

During the life of this 2006 Comprehensive Plan, a strong emphasis needs to be placed on implementing the Waldorf and Bryans Road-Indian Head plans. While zoning and regulatory



changes are an important component of implementation, they are not the only components. For example, implementing the Waldorf Sub-Area Plan includes concrete actions such as helping create activity centers, land acquisitions for public parking, and open spaces, road, transit, and pedestrian-bicycle transportation improvements, land assemblage, water and sewer infrastructure development, and coordinating private sector and public agency decision-making.

This type of coordinated implementation for a large area is something new for Charles County, and sufficient staff and financial resources need to be devoted to ensure success. The Waldorf Sub-Area Plan notes that the Charles County Department of Planning and Growth Management's Planning Division is the branch of County government currently best suited to play the lead managerial and organizational role, although staff with more implementation expertise may be needed.

## **2. Architectural and site development plan review**

Following the 1990 and 1997 Comprehensive Plan recommendations, the County created a Site Design and Architectural Review Board (SDARB). The Board started reviewing projects in 2003 pursuant to guidelines the County adopted for single-family residential development.

With only approximately two years of project reviews complete, it is too early to evaluate the SDARB's success in achieving its objectives. However, the general consensus is that the SDARB has had a positive effect, with developers willing to work with the Board to raise the quality of development design. Further, housing market trends in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area are resulting in developer proposals for new types of housing product offerings that promise greater site design and architectural diversity in Charles County. Looking to the future the needs are:

- Review by the SDARB of townhouse and multi-family projects.
- Review by the SDARB of commercial and industrial projects.

### *Planned Development Zones and Development Guidance System*

In 1992 the County incorporated a Development Guidance System (DGS) into the zoning ordinance. The DGS helps the County to establish a density range when land is rezoned as a floating zone for a Planned Development. Through the DGS a project scores points based on how well the project meets criteria established in the system. The higher the points score, the higher the potential density range that may be awarded. Use of the Planned Development floating zone has remained strong in the County. Recent projects include Scotland Heights, the Woods at Deer Creek, Waldorf Crossing Transit Oriented Development, Waldorf Technology Park, and Capital Business Park (pending as of 2005).

The DGS gives staff a useful framework to determine the relative degree of consistency of a proposed project with Comprehensive Plan objectives and to ensure that design and community facilities needs are incorporated. The DGS criteria (Section 297-116 of the Zoning Regulations) have not been comprehensively reviewed since they were first adopted and, as such, should be re-evaluated to ensure they reflect the current Comprehensive Plan.

### **3. Community revitalization and enhancement**

Much development in Charles County is recent. As noted in Chapter 7, the median build year for housing in the County is 1981, with just over seven percent of the housing units built in 1949 or earlier. Community revitalization is generally associated with older communities in or near the region's old cities – Washington, Baltimore, and Annapolis, but attention needs to be paid to some parts of Charles County so they remain healthy and do not become areas of disinvestment and decay. Three areas have been the focus of attention since 1997: Heathcote Road, Nanjemoy, and Hughesville.

In 2003 the County Department of Community Services prepared a plan for the Heathcote Road neighborhood in Smallwood Village. The plan was funded through the state's Community Legacy program and recommended ways to stabilize and improve the community. The plan was intended in part to be a model for revitalization plans for other communities in the County.

A number of grassroots community revitalization efforts have been undertaken in Nanjemoy including Even Start, a program assisting young people find employment and affordable housing, and the Nanjemoy Housing Task Force, an ad hoc committee with staff support from the Department of Community Services is ongoing.

Hughesville became the subject of intense development interest beginning around 2003 with the approval of the MD 5 Hughesville by-pass, and as the potential location for a minor-league baseball stadium. While there was disagreement over the suitability of Hughesville for a stadium (the proposal was withdrawn in 2004), there was general agreement that the commercial section of Hughesville, especially along MD 5, was in need of enhancement and revitalization. As of 2006, Hughesville is the subject of a special study. Planning issues include the current construction of a bypass around the congested MD 5/MD 231 intersection and a citizens' work group effort that began during the summer of 2005 to study possible revitalization/physical improvements to the existing village (see also Chapter 3 under Villages).

#### *Degraded areas*

Unattractive or degraded sites especially in highly visible locations can be a blighting influence. To the extent that such sites affect a community's image, they can impact economic development efforts. This problem is not unique to Charles County. Typically these sites are awaiting redevelopment. Unfortunately, while they are waiting, the community lives with the unsightliness.

The zoning ordinance contains a provision under its Development Guidance System whereby a development bonus can be awarded if a development redevelops an existing structure. Where there is a health hazard the Health Department can require some clean up, and under the BOCA code the County can require that a building be secured or be made structurally sound. In some cases the County or the local chamber of commerce can work with an owner to clean up a site: planting trees, removing debris, etc. Some communities, both in Maryland and elsewhere in the US, have an Appearance and Preservation Committee or similar group that works to maintain the appearance of designated areas. Some communities have created downtown development associations which level assessments against property owners to fund improvements such as policing, landscaping, trash pick up, and joint marketing.

#### *Villages*

Collectively villages play an important role in Charles County life. The Plan's objectives for villages are to preserve and enhance their present character so that they may continue to act as rural service areas and to serve their traditional roles in County life. The CWG made a special assessment of the County's villages as part of this 2006 Plan update (see discussion in Chapter 3). The CWG

recommended adopting design guidelines for villages so that future commercial and residential development is compatible with the particular village or settlement image, and focusing special County investment on villages in Heritage Area clusters and corridors designated in the Southern Maryland Heritage Area Heritage Tourism Management Plan. These include the National Register Historic Districts of Port Tobacco and Bryantown.

### *Gateways, signage*

Gateways in the form of well designed, appropriately sized signage, monuments, or landscape design help add a sense of place to places and can convey a sense of arrival (“you are here”). St. Charles uses gateways quite effectively throughout the community such as on St. Charles Parkway and in the Towne Center. Signage can have an important role in community revitalization and enhancement.

## **4. Scenic Roads and Landscapes**

A key contributor to public perception of community character is what can be seen from an automobile while driving along roads. For example, the easiest reference to rural character to recognize is natural, unmanaged or partially managed areas of landscape and an uninterrupted horizon of trees, fields and sky. Retention of these landscapes and views would be a significant step in preserving rural character.

Within the Development District not enough attention has been paid in some cases to the appearance of development from roadways (backs of houses facing the road, for example) and, because of their visibility, such cases have driven some of the concerns over development as a whole in the Development District. Little attention has also been paid to development along rural roads in rural areas.

With respect to protecting views from roads, Charles County currently has few formal tools for achieving this goal. The major tool is the highway corridor overlay zone for Routes 301, 210, 228 and 5. Among the purpose statements for these designated highway corridors are encouraging positive visual experiences and maintaining distinctive views and vistas. The key tools for achieving these purposes are i) general guidelines for architecture and site design standards, and ii) bufferyards and building setback requirements. The guidelines for site design recommend, for example, that new development not impede scenic views and that structures should not dominate existing development or natural landscape. The bufferyard requirements seek to soften the impact of development by requiring buildings to be set back and supplemented by landscaping, or landscape equivalents such as fencing or berming.

The tools now in place are limited: they apply only to the designated corridors, leaving views and vistas from other roads essentially unprotected; they are reactive rather than proactive; and the architectural and site design standards are very limited in scope. An alternative approach taken by some communities is to proactively designate specific roads, road segments, views or landscapes as worthy of protection and designing programs around those features. The advantage of this approach is that it proactively identifies features worthy of protection prior to development proposals, and permits protection measures to target important features. For example, rather than designate an entire road as scenic, only those segments with outstanding views may need special protection. Approaches vary depending on the desires of the community and its resources.

Several state agencies as well as regional and local programs have identified scenic roads and landscapes worthy of protection. The Maryland Scenic Byways Program, administered through the Maryland State Highway Administration has designated two scenic byways in Charles County including the Religious Freedom Tour and the Lower Patuxent River Tour. The Religious Freedom Tour follows the Potomac River extending through Nanjemoy along MD 224, and MD 6. At Port Tobacco it proceeds south along Chapel Point Road and Popes Creek Road. One branch continues on

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MD 257 to Cobb Island while another extends into St. Mary's County along MD 234. The Lower Patuxent Trail extends from Malcolm passing the Samuel Mudd House, through the historic village of Bryantown on MD 232 to MD 231. The trail follows MD 231 east through the village of Hughesville to Benedict. These trails are also identified as bicycle touring routes on Figure 5-5. The Southern Maryland Heritage Area Tourism Management Plan identifies the same areas as significant corridors that link key heritage resources. The Charles County Historic Sites Survey conducted over the last several years is another tool to help determine important landscapes and landscape features that are worthy of protection. Charles County in cooperation with St. Mary's County has applied for funding to develop a corridor management plan for the state-designated scenic byway known as the Religious Freedom Tour. This plan will determine how to best enhance, protect, and interpret the byway.

Charles County needs to adopt measures to protect its landscapes, views, vistas, and other features worthy of protection, beyond those currently afforded the limited protection under the highway corridor overlay zone. The County has a very broad range of such resources, and measures need to be tailored to the resources. Implementation strategies also need to be tailored to County government's financial and staff resources<sup>1</sup>.

### *Development along roads*

By paying special attention to development along roads it is possible to retain a countryside feel even in highly developed areas in the Development District. Techniques beyond those included in the highway corridor overlay zone include the following:

- Contain views by framing parcels with trees to create cells of interconnected development set in natural areas.
- Where possible, preserve areas of natural unmanaged wooded lots.
- Include native plant materials in landscape improvements.
- Juxtapose areas of vegetation on site with green areas on adjoining properties.
- Restrict the height of freestanding signs to keep them visually below the skyline.
- Use random massing of new plant material where possible to complement and reinforce existing vegetation.
- Use compatible materials that blend in or look rustic, such as wooden or corten guard rails instead of galvanized steel.

## **5. Benchmarking**

During preparation of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, the County was concerned about the health and vitality of its communities, and wanted to understand better the role it could play in building and improving healthy communities. Community health and vitality have improved in much of the County since 1997 reducing much of this concern, but the following section from the 1997 Plan is retained for possible future use. A myriad of factors influence the health of communities: schools, economy, infrastructure, recreation, environment, the Arts etc. The difficulty for the County is understanding where it should direct its efforts to have the greatest impact. To give governments this understanding many are now using a technique known as benchmarking.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not envisioned, for example, that the County embark on a program comparable to the Mount Vernon viewshed protection program. That program has taken decades of planning, involvement of a coalition of local, state, and federal government officials and nongovernmental organizations, and is backed up by expensive and sophisticated computer capabilities, that can model the impacts of future development on the Mount Vernon viewshed. This type of program is beyond the County's means.

Benchmarks or indicators are measures that a community can use to evaluate its health and to set future goals. Chapter 3 of this Plan update recommends that the County use indicators to monitor the fiscal and economic success of its land development policies. The County could use other indicators to evaluate its community or social health, in areas such as crime and education. The use of indicators permits a community to establish policy priorities based on how it is performing in areas that it deems important.

The increased availability of different kinds of data permits communities to develop composite indexes using different indicators. Jacksonville Florida, for example, uses approximately 100 indicators to develop an annual quality of life index. Sustainable Seattle, a volunteer network and civic forum, developed a report for Seattle, Washington using 40 indicators under five headings: environment, population and resources, economy, youth and education, and health and community. Choosing the indicators is in itself a major challenge. Not everything can be measured and, in some cases, a careful choice must be made as to which indicator will be used as the yardstick for the County's performance in a certain area.

The advantage of a composite index is that it brings together in one report all the data concerning factors a community deems important. Once collected the data must be analyzed to determine what it is really saying so that an appropriate action plan can be developed to address the issues.

### Implementation Strategies

**1. Pay special attention to community development implementation during the life of this Comprehensive Plan.** A new objective added to this Chapter for the 2006 Plan update is to move beyond planning into the nuts and bolts of implementation with concrete actions such as helping create activity centers with land acquisitions for public parking and open spaces, road, transit, and pedestrian-bicycle transportation improvements, facilitate land assemblage, water and sewer infrastructure development, and coordinating private sector and public agency decision-making. This type of coordinated implementation is something new for Charles County, and sufficient staff and financial resources need to be devoted to ensure success.

**2. Create a coordinated community development, revitalization, and enhancement program.** Community development, revitalization, and enhancement currently occur on a somewhat ad hoc basis, with the Departments of Planning and Growth Management and Community Services as the two lead agencies. These activities could be better coordinated covering areas such as:

- ⇒ Developing neighborhood revitalization plans for communities using the Heathcote Road Community Legacy plan as a model.
- ⇒ Incorporating gateway signage into revitalization or enhancement plans for mixed use areas, activity centers, villages, and other special places.
- ⇒ Continuing community development efforts in Nanjemoy.
- ⇒ Promoting the development of different types of housing product with good design (see Chapter 7, Housing).
- ⇒ Developing plans for villages (see below).
- ⇒ Developing more proactive implementation plans including continuing to work with state and local agencies, citizens, and the development community.
- ⇒ Support for the Arts (see also Chapter 4).

**3. Develop a functional plan for Bensville.** The purpose of a functional plan is to ensure that as development occurs, it fits into a well-functioning context. This plan should address how Bensville will function with regards to circulation (roads, transit, walking and bicycling), and community facilities especially sewer and water, schools, and parks and recreation (see discussion in Chapter 3).

**4. Complete the Hughesville village revitalization plan.** This plan began in July 2005.

**5. Adopt techniques to improve community character in rural areas.** These include:

- ⇒ Identify key views, vistas and landscapes, and methods for their preservation. Methodology is described below under scenic roads, vistas, and landscapes.
- ⇒ Develop plans for specific parts of the rural area. In 1996 an Economic Development and Stewardship Plan for the Wicomico River Watershed was initiated. After the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, attention was focused on the Zekiah watershed and on Nanjemoy.
- ⇒ Develop specific plans for villages. The land use concept plan designates 22 villages, discusses their important role in County life, and describes some overall concepts for their development character (see also Chapter 3).
- ⇒ Apply design guidelines for village or roadside commercial site layout and architecture. The commercial and industrial development guidelines developed in 2004 for use by the SDARB contain guidelines for development in the VC Village Commercial zoning district and give guidance to architects and engineers for how to incorporate such development into the landscape.
- ⇒ Study residential clustering techniques to preserve rural character and assist in agricultural conservation. Clustering is a common residential subdivision design technique that exchanges typical large lot layouts for compact village-scale lots with contiguous preserved open space. In rural Charles County clustering is permitted as an option on parcels over 50 acres. The minimum lot size can be 40,000 square feet, but a minimum 60 percent of the subdivision must be open space, and there is a maximum density, set at one unit per three acres. Consideration will be given to mandatory clustering requirements to preserve open space (see also Chapter 9, Agriculture and Forestry).

**6. Develop corridor plans for highway corridors.** Charles County's designated highway corridors, Routes 301, 210, 228, and 5, are different in character and needs<sup>2</sup>. The highway corridor overlay zone allows for different designs along the different corridors but does not prescribe site or building treatments. Corridor plans can be prepared in much the same way as area plans: analyzing the corridor, developing a vision and putting in place a plan to achieve the vision. For example, emphasis on the MD 210 corridor might be to retain the existing forested edge along the road. The vision for MD 5 east of Waldorf could be on preserving views and vistas.

A component of this planning should be a review of the sufficiency of the existing architectural and site design guidelines in the highway corridor overlay zone section of the zoning ordinance. The guidelines are limited in scope and may need to be strengthened.

Chapter 3 of this Comprehensive Plan recommends that consideration be given to adding MD 6 from Poor House Road east to the St. Mary's County line, Western Parkway, and the Cross County Connector to the highways covered by the Highway Corridor overlay in the Zoning Regulations.

**7. Revise the County's sign regulations.** The regulations have not been given a comprehensive review since they were adopted in 1992.

**8. Development Guidance System (DGS).** Review the DGS criteria (Section 297-116 of the Zoning Regulations) to ensure they reflect the current goals and objectives in the Comprehensive Plan.

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<sup>2</sup> Designation for Route 6 east of Poor House Road is recommended in Chapter 3 of this Plan Update.

**9. Adopt a rural and scenic roads, landscapes and vistas program for both the Development District and the County's rural areas.** Steps should include:

- ⇒ Formally recognize the state, local, and regionally designated scenic byways identified by the State Highway Administration and the regional tourism offices.
- ⇒ Using existing and new tools and resources, prepare an inventory of roads, landscapes and vistas based on defined terms and objective criteria. Terms such as historic, rural, agricultural and scenic are interrelated and are often used interchangeably. It is important to define each term so that people understand which values are being described and which qualities are desirable to preserve and protect.
- ⇒ Design protection measures around the identified resources. The inventory should dictate the approach to be taken towards management of the resources.
- ⇒ Give early consideration to what designation would mean in terms of regulation. This will depend on the outcome of the inventory analysis. The results of the analysis and review of regulations already in place (zoning, subdivision, design guidelines etc.) will determine what needs to be additionally regulated or managed by a scenic roads, landscapes and vistas program.
- ⇒ Consider particular ways of preserving elements of rural character within the Development District.
- ⇒ Consider incorporating designated features into the County's Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan.
- ⇒ Develop a corridor management plan for the Religious Freedom Scenic Byway.